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ABSTRACT

As this paper demonstrates, studying abortive educational reforms reveals a great deal about the complex political dynamics involved in making (and unmaking) key policy decisions. Using case studies of France and West Germany, the paper argues that the state in advanced industrial countries tends to maximize the political gains derived from designing and appearing to implement reforms while minimizing political costs. This situation is attributed to the erosion of the state's legitimacy and to the vulnerability of the state's authority where education is concerned. The case of West Germany centers on attempting to introduce a comprehensive postelementary education system in lieu of the traditional three-tiered system. The case of the Fifth Republic of France (since 1958) is more difficult and diffuse, with projects aimed in various directions over the years. The central tendency was to overcome or reduce the internal stratification in secondary schooling. This paper explains each case, advances the theoretical argument concerned with state authority, and shows how the two cases support the design of educational reforms as a much less hazardous and more advantageous proposition than their implementation. France and West Germany hold no monopoly on the politics of nonreform in education; reforms elsewhere are also withering on the vine as rhetoric enlarges and financial capability decreases. Included are 32 references. (MLH)

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THE POLITICS OF ABORTED REFORM:

EDUCATION AND THE LEGITIMACY OF THE STATE IN FRANCE AND WEST GERMANY

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Introduction and overview

It may be a more pleasant task to study success rather than failure in educational reform; from a theoretical point of view, however, the story of how and why reforms fail can be at least as instructive, and perhaps even more so, than the story of successful reforms. This paper sets out to make this point, and to demonstrate that studying aborted reforms in education reveals a great deal about the complex political dynamics that are involved in the making and unmaking of key policy decisions. Somewhat more specifically, the paper argues, on the basis of case studies of France and West Germany, that the state in advanced industrial societies has a tendency to maximize the political gain to be derived from designing, and appearing to implement, educational reforms, while at the same time to minimize the political cost associated with carrying them through. The theoretical argument behind this thesis has to do with the structurally precarious situation of political authority in the modern state, i.e., with the erosion of the state's legitimacy, and with the particular vulnerability of the state's authority where something as normatively delicate and controversial as education is concerned (Dahrendorf 1979; Habermas 1975; Offe 1984; Weiler 1983a; Wolfe 1977). Considering the key role that educational systems play not only in the inculcation of knowledge, skills, and values, but also in the allocation of statuses and their rewards, it is not surprising that attempts to introduce major changes into educational systems typically generate considerable conflict. An important part of the political calculus of reform policy, therefore, is to contain and manage such conflicts in order to minimize the threat to the state's authority.

France (during the Fifth Republic, i.e., since 1958) and the Federal

Republic of Germany (since the late 1960s) provide instructive cases in point for further developing and illustrating this general thesis, and for identifying both a common approach and two rather different strategies for dealing with the controversies that tend to surround educational reform projects. Broadly speaking, both attempts at educational reform aim at greater "comprehensiveness" in post-elementary and pre-university education, i.e., at removing or reducing partitions within the structure of secondary schooling that have traditionally been closely associated with the social origin of students: Students from higher socio-economic backgrounds have tended to be heavily overrepresented in the more demanding and prestigious "filières" in France or in the German Gymnasium, while working class children have found themselves disproportionately in the lower-status "filières" of the German Hauptschule. There are important differences between the two countries (and, at different points in time, within each country) in both the traditional shape of secondary schooling and the designs for reform, but the reform plans of the 1960s and 1970s do have this concern for a more open and at least potentially more equitable form of secondary schooling in common with a number of other countries and reform plans over the last twenty or thirty years; whether and why some of these other attempts (notably Great Britain and Sweden) have been more successful than France's and West Germany's is an intriguing question to discuss, but will have to stay outside the scope of this already overextended exercise for the time being.

By way of a brief summary (which is further detailed in the body of the paper), the case of the Federal Republic of Germany centers on the attempt to introduce, as a measure to enhance equity in both access to education and

educational success, a comprehensive system of post-elementary education (Gesamtschule) in lieu of the traditional three-tiered system (Hauptschule, Realschule, and Gymnasium) (Max-Planck Institute 1983; Raschert 1974; Weiler 1983b; 1985). The proposal polarized the West German polity in the late 1960s and early 1970s into staunch advocates and equally adamant opponents of the reform, and either the full-scale introduction of the reform or its withdrawal would have incurred exorbitant political costs. In this situation, the construct of the "policy experiment" became the saving device for defusing the impending conflict. The new, comprehensive type of secondary school was going to be introduced, but only on a limited scale and on a trial basis; its performance was to be evaluated over an extended period of time in comparison with the conventional system, and the results of the evaluation were to inform the ultimate policy decision over which type of school definitely to adopt for the entire system. The device was ingenuous, and worked rather well, at least for a while: The advocates of the reform felt they had won an important first step, and now had a chance to prove that the new type of school was capable of doing what it was claimed to do. The opponents were satisfied that, by and large, the old system was kept in place, and were confident in their turn about the eventual outcome of the comparative evaluation of the two systems, or at least about the staying power of the old system. And the political costs to the state, which could have been enormous had the controversy fully erupted, were kept to a tolerable level. In retrospect, however, besides defusing at the time the immediate potential for explosive confrontation, the device of the policy experiment proved ill-suited as a means to stem the re-surging power of the status quo ante; the very tentativeness and marginality of the experimental Gesamtschule made it quite vulnerable when the political pendulum swung back

from the phase of reform enthusiasm. Today, while a good many comprehensive schools are left, especially in those of the West German Länder in which the Social Democrats have continued to hold power, they have largely become absorbed and coopted into the continuing, if somewhat modified presence of the conventional, three-tiered system, rather than become its structural replacement.

The case of educational reform in the Fifth Republic of France (since 1958) is different and somewhat more diffuse, as reform projects have aimed in a number of different directions over the years, each associated with one in the long line of Ministers of Education who succeeded one another (Weiler 1988). One of the central tendencies in most of these reforms, however, has been the attempt to overcome or reduce the internal stratification in secondary schooling, especially at the upper end ("quatrième" and "troisième") of the first cycle of the "secondaire", i.e., in years three and four of post-elementary schooling; the most pronounced reform models in this respect were René Haby's (1974-80) "collège unique" -- part of the political agenda of the "centrist" administration of President Giscard d'Estaing (1974-81) -- and the late Alain Savary's (1981-84) "collège démocratique" in the early years of the Mitterand presidency. The long line of reform champions occupying the Ministry of Education already suggests an answer to the question of how the state in France deals with the issue of reform and political conflict. A closer look at these and some related reform attempts suggests the high political currency, in the context of French politics, of engaging in the design and planning of reform proposals, as well as the rather substantial and, in most cases, prohibitive political costs of implementing them. The very process of elabor-

ately studying, discussing, designing, and revieving educational reform plans seems to acquire a poverful symbolic presence in its own right, and to confer upon the state the added legitimacy that results from the appearance of seriously anticipating and coping with social change and its implications for education. Having thus established the image of an alert, reform-minded state, the actual failure of implementing the reforms can then be much more easily attributed to recalcitrant teachers unions, rebellious students, or insurmountable budgetary difficulties.

These are, in a nutshell, the two cases on which the theoretical reflections in this paper are based. The body of the paper contains information on the two cases, presented as briefly as possible and in as much detail as necessary for the conclusions to be drawn from it. The final part of the paper will take up the theoretical argument of this introduction again, and show how each of these two cases, although in instructively different ways, lend at least some initial weight to the notion that for the modern state, from the point of view of its legitimacy, the design of educational reforms is a much less hazardous and much more advantageous proposition than their implementation.

The French case

Speaking of "educational reform" in the French as in any other context covers a considerable variety of initiatives -- from changes in the extent and nature of pre-school programs to reforms of university education, and from changes in content and curriculum to changes in the structural arrangements for selection, orientation, and certification. For purposes of this paper, our

principal attention will be on the first and the second cycle of the "secondaire", the four-plus-three structure of French secondary education that follows upon the five years of the "élémentaire". It has been the secondary level that has been at the center of much of the reform activity over these last three decades, and it is here that the experience of abortive attempts has been most pervasive.

The period of our review starts out with a real reform -- the extension of compulsory schooling to the age of 16 in 1959, which ultimately became effective in 1967, and over which there seems to have been very little dissent. Most of the initiatives that followed focused on the internal structure of, and the "channeling" of students through, the post-elementary phase of the system. Berthoin's idea of a "cycle d'observation" during the first two years of the secondary ("Sixième" and "Cinquième") and of a distinction between "collèges d'enseignement général" and "collèges d'enseignement technique" anticipated some of the key notions of later reform projects, but the effort "ran out of breath" ("essoufflée") rather quickly as it did not really challenge the existing structures (Bilan 1981, 15). It is interesting to note that the new "collèges d'enseignement technique" were found to adapt much more readily and effectively to new and changing needs than their generalist twin -- probably a function of the more tangible pressures from a rapidly changing technical and professional clientele (ibid.).

1963, under the leadership of Minister Fouchet, saw the consolidation of a "middle" level of post-elementary education in the form of the "collèges d'enseignement secondaire", encompassing the first cycle of the "secondaire"

(sixième through troisième). In response both to a tremendous increase in the number of students at that time and to a perceived need for more effective selection mechanisms, a system of three tracks or "filières" ("classe de type I, II, III") is introduced into this middle level to differentiate between students of different types and levels of aptitude and thus to anticipate the all-important differentiation and selection arrangements of the second cycle. Besides the question of how much of the Fouchet reforms was actually implemented, the assessment of how far this initiative went in changing the nature of the post-elementary system is mixed and depends, not surprisingly, very much on how much importance a given observer attaches to greater equality of educational opportunity as one of the criteria for assessing educational reform. While the new system opened up the top part of the first cycle of the secondaire (quatrième and troisième) to a much larger number of students, it subjected at the same time the students to a much more rigorous and thorough system of "tracking" in the "filières". The net result, given the existing social dynamics of educational access and success in France, was that the pattern of school-based social stratification, "le rapport entre les cursus scolaires et l'appartenance à une catégorie socio-professionelle," remained basically unchanged (Bilan 1981, 18).

By contrast, the reform projects of the 1970s, reflecting some of the impulses of the protest movement of 1968, were designed to move boldly into an era of greater equality of educational opportunity, while at the same time facing the challenges of an increasingly modernization- and technology-conscious French society. The initial step had been taken by Joseph Fontanet, whose tenure as a Minister of Education and as a reformer was cut short by the

death of Georges Pompidou (Charlot 1974). In his succession, René Haby, serving as Minister of Education under France's new centrist President, Giscard d'Estaing, and Prime Minister Jacques Chirac, became identified with what has probably been the most ambitious and comprehensive educational reform project of the Fifth Republic. The thrust of Haby's plans was as much a reflection of limitations of the earlier reform history in France as of the signs and the spirit of the times. The inability of earlier French efforts à la Fouchet to pry open the close linkage between social status and educational opportunity became all the more conspicuous in the light of efforts in a number of countries to move towards more "comprehensive" forms of post-elementary education in an attempt to overcome or reduce the class biases of earlier and more stratified systems: Sweden had paved the way by introducing the nine-year comprehensive school in 1962 (Heidenheimer 1974; 1978; Husen 1962; 1986); Great Britain was moving gingerly towards "comprehensivization" in secondary education, and a major social experiment was underway in the Federal Republic of Germany to introduce a comprehensive Gesamtschule to overcome the built-in stratification of the traditional three-tier system (see below and Weiler 1983a; 1983b). The key piece of the Haby reform, the notion of the "collège unique" with an essentially common core ("tronc commun") for the entire first cycle of the secondaire, corresponds in its philosophical and pedagogical orientation quite closely to these other developments around Western Europe, even though it was a bit behind schedule by comparison. Within the common core of the first cycle, the structural principle was, in theory, diametrically opposed to the "filières" of the 1963 project, and was designed to create "des conditions d'acceuil et de cursus identique pour tous" (Bilan 1981, 19). While the first two years of the "collège" were to be strictly the same for every-

body, the next two years were to become an "orientation cycle" which would combine pre-professional electives with a continuation of the basic core. The second cycle -- the last three years of the "secondaire" -- was to be reformed in the same spirit: Following the "Brevet des collèges" at the end of the first cycle, students moving on into the "lycées générales" (rather than into the two-year "lycée d'enseignement professionelle) would follow a largely common curriculum for the first two years of the second cycle, after which they would take the first part of the "Bac" before entering the final and more specialized year of the "terminale", preparing for the final half of the "Bac" (Coombs 1978).

The spirit of the Haby project is clear, and the scope of its proposed implementation comprehensive -- reaching all the way from expanding pre-school education to modifying the modalities of university entrance: Through delaying the points of irreversible "tracking" (through selection/orientation) towards one or another ultimate career option until well into the second cycle, students are to be given more time and help in identifying and developing their true talent and vocation. Implementation aside, the concept itself represents a major change over previous designs of the French educational system.

If the design and adoption of this project was already a major political production, especially considering the power and reluctance of some of the major interest groups concerned (see Coombs 1978, 496-501), implementation was a different matter again. The first minor changes were introduced in 1977, but some of the more significant changes -- having to do with the "tronc commun" in the first cycle -- did not begin to reach the schools until the beginning of

classes in the fall of 1980. By that time, Haby had been replaced by Beullac, the plans for the reform of the second cycle -- an integral part of the reform concept -- were still on the drawing board, and it was only seven months to the presidential election of May 1981, which brought François Mitterand and a socialist government to power in France and M. Alain Savary to the Ministry of Education.

The assessment of how much of a real reform Haby was able to accomplish is made difficult by this peculiar timing of French macro-politics. When the "Commission chargée d'etablir le bilan de la situation de la France" reported in late 1981 about the state of the educational system, it concluded its extensive review of the "réforme Haby" by saying quite categorically that "le collège unique n'existe pas" -- at least not in the sense that the first cycle of the "secondaire" was across the board of similar quality and made up of a reasonably homogeneous student population (Bilan 1981, 46). To expect such a homogenization to emerge from within a highly stratified system in a matter of a few years may well have been unrealistic. Even so, the data on the regional and urban/rural disparities in the quality of educational programs and in the educational mobility of students indicate that the system in 1981 was a long way from what Haby and the French legislature had planned in 1975. More significantly even, it seems that the old demons of tracking had found a back door to move back into the first cycle where, under the guise of some of the electives in the "orientation cycle" (quatrième and troisième), some of the old "filières" began to re-emerge. Without much real orientation, it appears that large numbers of students at this level were directed towards the (lower-status) option of vocational and professional schooling, without the benefit of

a full orientation which would have been open to the full range of options for the second cycle, including the academic route to the "lycée générale" (Bilan 1981, 37-38). The factfinding panel of 1981, in assessing this situation, even goes as far as speaking of "new tracks of exclusion" ("les nouvelles filières d'exclusion") which, "more or less disguised, function essentially for the children who are socially already the most disadvantaged" (ibid., 52). Two years later, the diagnostic of Legrand's report about the collège speaks of the "évictions dans des voies parallèles" (referring to the "orientation" tracking into the "lycées d'enseignement professionelle") and, worse yet, of the "segregation into tracks without hope" ("ségrégations dans des filières sans espoir", i.e., the "classes préprofessionelles de niveau", or CPPN) (Legrand 1983, 168 and passim). Thus, whether because of lack of time or other factors, the evidence suggests that the "success" of the Haby reform, the degree to which the French system of post-elementary education was actually made more "comprehensive", was rather limited, and did not move beyond the first two years of the first cycle of the "secondaire".

The next three years of educational policy in France are associated with the name of Alain Savary and with an unprecedented effort of analysing the state of the educational system and the options for its further development. Expert commissions, studies, reports abounded -- the mobilization of talent and effort on behalf of developing a new vision for the future of French education was impressive indeed. A substantial body of evaluative insight into past developments and of projections of future options found its way into the various reports that Savary's administration commissioned (e.g., B. Schwartz 1981; L. Schwartz 1981; Prost 1983; Legrand 1983). The Legrand report ("Pour

un collège démocratique") completes the assessment of Haby's effort undertaken by the 1981 Commission du Bilan and puts a great deal of emphasis, interestingly enough, on the need to avoid the re-emergence of "tracks" in the upper levels of the first cycle, confirming once again the critical role of that linkage between first and second cycle of the "secondaire" in improving the permeability of the system for students from widely divergent backgrounds. To get rid of the "segregative tracks" (filières ségrégatives) at the level of the "quatrième" and "troisième" is seen as a "political imperative" and as a way of getting back to Haby's idea of a truly comprehensive full first cycle, from the "sixième to the "troisième". This same purpose is to be served by a number of curricular changes, notably the introduction of subject options alongside the traditional literary options for the two last years of the first cycle. However -- and here the lessons learned from the non-reform of Haby become clearly audible -- "the choice of these options must under no circumstances lead to reconstituting tracks"! (Legrand 1983, 169-170 and passim) Once again, the ground was prepared, under politically exceedingly favorable circumstances and with a healthy budget allocation to boot, for a major challenge to the seemingly intractable collusion between the internal structure of French secondary education and the reproductive dynamics of the French social structure; the "collège démocratique" was to consummate the dream of the "école unique".

In pursuing this objective, Savary's political style was characterized as breaking with the tradition of "grand reform projects" à la Fouchet and Haby, and as being guided by a sense of "discretion and pragmatism" (Darmau and Maté 1986, 3; cf. Savary 1981). Nonetheless, it was another part of his reform program, the plan for closer association between the parochial schools and the

state (the "grand service public unifié et laique de l'éducation nationale") which proved to be the undoing of Savary and, to some extent, of even those reform projects that had nothing to do with the controversy between state and private education that erupted in 1984. On June 24, 1984, tens of thousands of parents of students in private schools took to the streets to protest the government's plans for enhancing state control over private education; the government had to withdraw its bill and its Minister of Education, and Alain Savary was succeeded by Jean-Pierre Chevènement, who held the office until the victory of the conservative coalition of Jacques Chirac in the legislative elections of March 1986. The spectacular failure of the attempt to redesign the relationship between public and private education provided a rude awakening and a tough lesson for the socialist government; now that it was clear that the dream of the great unified and secular system of education was over, flexibility and diversity became the operative terms of the debate within the Parti Socialiste. Against the background of the massive demonstration of strength of the private school, the only feasible course of action seemed to be to show that the public school was, after all, the better school (Le Monde de l'Education, July/August 1985, 8-9).

Jean-Pierre Chevènement fully identified with that agenda, and became its skillful promoter. While he claimed to continue some of the initiatives of his predecessor, especially where the reform of the Lycées are concerned (Ministère 1986, 16), he was quick in establishing an identity and a vision of his own for the future of French education (and, indeed, ambitious politician that he is, of France). Very little of the massive process of consultation and reflection during the Savary period finds its way into the Chevènement era (Le Monde de

l'Education, January 1987, 9). The achievement of greater equality remains on the agenda, if rather less conspicuously than before, but the overriding preoccupation is now with restoring to the school its most crucial function of transmitting knowledge, and with enabling it to do so with as much competence and quality as possible. Concerns with international competition, with mastering modern technologies, with making the most of France's "human resources" loom large on Chevènement's policy agenda. Referring to the argument over public and private education as the "wrong" kind of fight, he affirms that "the only educational battle worth fighting is that over the quality of instruction", and continues: "We have to restore the school of the Republic, and give it the means to be once again the best. This is a decisive challenge for France, for intelligence is our principal resource." (cited by Darmau and Maté 1986, 4). There is a similar programmatic connotation in the title of his book, "Apprendre pour entreprendre" (1985) -- a jeu de mots that would somewhat crudely translate into "Learning for Earning". It is therefore not surprising that technology does loom large in the plans that were worked out under Chevènement for the curricular content of both the collèges and the lycées, and especially in the plans for a new and prestigious "filière technologique" in the ambitious new law of December 20, 1985 (Ministère 1986, 11-14 and passim); France's survival as an independent entity in the beginning 21st century requires the best trained manpower possible, and a very achievement-oriented, quality-conscious school system is to play a crucial role in this process. The central tendency is "restaurer l'école plutot que la réformer" (Darmau and Maté 1986, 3) -- bring the school back to its basic values of excellence, hard work, and professional or pre-professional competence. Avoiding the very term "reform" (in favor of "restoration") is meant to distance the effort from its

hapless predecessor.

Once again, however, the clock became a factor in French educational policy. Chevènement announced his plan for the reform of the lycée in November of 1985, just a few months prior to the elections to the Assemblée Nationale in March of 1986. The left lost its majority in the legislature, a new coalition of gaullists (RPR) and center-right groups (UDF) took over the reins of government in "cohabitation" with a Socialist president, Jacques Chirac was named Prime Minister, René Monory Minister of Education, and Alain Devaquet, Vice-Minister in charge of higher education and scientific research.

The rest is recent history and has, against the background of this tour d'horizon of the last thirty years of educational policy in France, some appearance of déjà vu. Upon assuming office, the second thing M. Monory did (the first one was to abolish the "loi Savary" of 1983 about the reform of higher education) was to erase unceremoniously Chevènement's entire reform of the lycée. Not immune either to what the education editor of Le Monde calls "the virus of reformitis" (Le Monde, 24 April 1986), Monory proceeds to develop, in the course of 1986, his own reform of the lycée, just as, in his turn, Alain Devaquet proceeds to a new law on higher education to replace the "loi Savary", leading to the "loi Devaquet" that served as a rallying point for the massive student demonstrations in November and December of 1986.

There is little point in adding to our collection a summary of the reforms that Monory had in mind for the lycée (see Le Monde de l'Education, January 1987, 11, for a brief summary). After the "loi Devaquet" for the universities

(as well as the political career of M. Devaquet) went to an early demise at the hands of a generation of students who had become tired of having their future played around with by eager reformers of different persuasions in rapid succession, M. Monory felt moved to withdraw his reform project for the "secondaire" as well. The message that came, loud and clear, from the students in the street -- "Stop the reformitis" (ibid., 9) -- was heard at both the Ministry of Education and at the Hotel Matignon. Prime Minister Chirac declared "la pause", a moratorium until further notice of all social reforms that his government had committed itself to undertaking. And with presidential elections beginning to loom on the political horizon, there was little inclination to risk interrupting the moratorium before the Spring of 1988.

The West German case

The attempt to reform the secondary level of the West German school system in the late 1960s and early 1970s was at least as ambitious as any of the reforms contemplated under the auspices of MM. Haby and Savary, and certainly even more controversial. That it was so controversial was not only a function of a more strictly polarized political system in the FRG (between Social Democrats on the left and Christian Democrats on the right), compared to a slightly more dispersed distribution of political camps in France, but very much of the nature of the reform. Instead of proposing, as in France, structural adjustments within the existing institutional shell of the educational system, the initial reform proposal in West Germany was nothing less than to do away with the time-honored three-tier system of post-elementary education altogether, and replace it with an entirely new form of secondary school -- the Gesamtschule or comprehensive school (Raschert 1974). Where an educational

system is so deeply intertwined with cultural traditions and, even more importantly, social structures as the traditional German triad Hauptschule-Realschule-Gymnasium has been, any attempt to change the system is bound to generate tremendous conflict, even in a period which, like the 1960s, was remarkable for its favorable disposition towards the notion of reform.

I have elsewhere dealt in much greater detail with the complex political maneuvers that surrounded the design and introduction of this particular change (Weiler 1983a; 1983b; 1985). In the context of this paper, I would like to focus on one particular aspect of this overall policy scenario. This aspect has to do with the use of experimentation as a strategy for introducing reform under conditions of major conflict or anticipated conflict, and with the political utility of that strategy in the West German context. The device was not patented on this particular occasion in the FRG; other countries, including the United States, have used similar strategies in order to introduce educational and other innovations on an experimental basis (Pincus 1974), and a sizeable literature has emerged around the theory and practice of experimentation as a policy tool (Campbell 1969; Riecken and Boruch 1974; etc.).

Still, the West German case was rather unprecedented, in terms of both the overall magnitude of the experiment and of the political delicacy that surrounded it. Once the Gesamtschule proposal was on the political table, it was clear that there was no easy way out at either side of this issue: Maintaining the traditional three-tiered secondary school structure would have seriously discredited the social-democratic/liberal coalition that came to power in the Federal Republic in 1969, and that had made the creation of a more

egalitarian educational system one of the principal planks of its political platform. At the same time, the full-scale abolition of the traditional system and its replacement by the new comprehensive Gesamtschule would have been bitterly and vigorously opposed by a strong coalition on the conservative side of the political spectrum; a major and quite possibly debilitating political conflict would have been unavoidable (Naschold 1974).

In this situation, the device of experimentation appeared superbly expedient not only as an instrument of effective conflict management, but also as a means of what I have come to call "compensatory legitimation": For the advocates of reform, it provided an opportunity to demonstrate willingness to move ahead beyond the level of mere rhetoric to at least a partial change of reality. For the opponents of reform, the experimental program left the existing system largely untouched, limiting changes to a restricted number of "enclaves". At the same time, the scientific connotation of the experimental design of the intervention contributed substantially to the credibility of the process; furthermore, it had a temporizing effect in that it persuaded even some of the more ardent advocates of the reform that time was needed to let this macro-experiment run its natural course and demonstrate (as they expected it would) the new system's superiorirty over the old one in no uncertain, scientific terms.

It is easy to understand why experimentation was seen as such a splendid vehicle for weathering the political storms that the Gesamtschule issue had the potential of unleashing. It lies in the nature of educational systems that the comparative assessment of different structures of schooling requires at least a

number of years until the effect of different approaches can be validly ascertained. On the part of both advocates and opponents, the initial hope and expectation was that, by the time the comparative assessment of Gesamtschule and conventional system had been completed five, six, or more years later, the violence of the initial sentiments would have melloved and made way for a less confrontational policy climate. In a sense, both sides were right in their expectations; as it turned out, however, the opponents of the Gesamtschule derived a good deal more gain from this phase of experimentation than the advocates.

To tell th full story of what happened to the experimental Gesamtschule program in the FRG would be a complex undertaking (see Max-Planck Institute 1973, 217-235; Rolff 1984, 69-86; Klemm et al. 1985, 59-76), especially as it varies somevhat across the different Länder of the Federal Republic. But the basic pattern is reasonably straightforward:

(a) A major effort was made to design and comparatively evaluate the assessments of the Gesamtschule and the conventional schools;

(b) In terms of the relative performance of the two types of schools as revealed in these assessments, the results varied, depending on location and on what outcome measures were being looked at; there was no clear distinction between the two on any one set of indicators, including achievement;

(c) As in elections, the findings were invariably interpreted in favor of the point of view of the interpreter; where an indicator showed unfavorable results for one's preferred type of schools, the importance of that particular indicator was disputed in favor of other indicators where performance data were more favorable;

(d) The extraordinary amount of data, publications, and debates notwithstanding, the major policy decisions on whether or not to expand Gesamtschulen and move them from their experimental to a more regular status seem to have largely been made without any considerations of the results of the assessment. Considering this pattern, it does seem reasonable to suggest that what really mattered in the strategy of experimentation was the connotation of rationality and scientific rigor that it conferred upon the policy process and that, once this procedural legitimation was accomplished by setting up the experiments, the findings mattered little.

The politics of aborted reform and the issue of legitimacy

In both the French and the West German case, there are more than one possible explanation for why, in spite of tremendous investments of political energy, expertise, and resources, the major reform of the structure of the secondary school system did not materialize except for some relatively marginal and ultimately insignificant amendments of the existing system. The most obvious explanation in both cases has to do with the macro-political discontinuities that altered significantly the configuration of the major political forces in each country over the past twenty years or so. The 1981 election of a socialist President in France (Mitterand), which brought to an end the reform plans of Haby, the change from a social democratic/liberal to a more conservative christian democratic/liberal coalition in Bonn in March of 1983, volatile incidents like the parents' protest for the rights of parochial schools in France in the summer of 1984, which brought to a premature end the tenure of Education Minister Alain Savary -- these and other shifts in the political context of educational policy could well be held accountable for jeopardizing

some earlier reforms.

I am not denying that they did; I do argue, however, that the magnitude of the philosophical-ideological changes involved in these shifts, and thus their impact on the substance of educational reform, tend to be overestimated. After all, and interestingly enough, there is a good deal less difference between, say, the "comprehensivization" projects of (centrist) Minister Haby and (socialist) Minister Savary than there is between, say, the reform agendas of socialist Ministers Savary and Chevènement; and the Free Democratic Party (FDP) in West Germany, which was one of the main driving forces behind the Gesamtschule reform plan when it was the liberal coalition partner of the Social Democrats, remained part of the government when, in 1983, the FDP switched to a coalition with the Christian Democrats in an otherwise rather major re-orientation of German politics at the federal level ("die Wende"); furthermore, it is clear that, even before this change in national politics in 1983, the SPD/FDP coalition had begun to lose interest in some of its own reform projects. Thus, while discontinuity in the wider political framework for educational policy does contribute to an understanding of the ups and downs of particular reform projects, it does not by itself explain the rather striking contrast between, on the one hand, an exceedingly persistent and energetic pursuit of reform plans and designs and, on the other hand, a conspicuous absence of any significant consummation of the reform.

In searching for further and more satisfactory explanations, we do need to return to some of the basic theoretical notions about the nature of the modern state. Without venturing to recapitulate what is by now a major literature on

the legitimation of political authority in modern societies, I propose to retain for purposes of this argument (a) the basic notion of the precariousness of the state's legitimacy, especially under conditions of intense policy conflict, and (b) the assumption, borne out in my own interviews of policy-makers, that those who act on behalf of the state are keenly aware of this precariousness, and actively concerned with containing or reversing the erosion of the state's authority. This concerns expresses itself, as I have argued elsewhere, through different strategies of "compensatory legitimation"; among them, one can identify in a variety of policy settings fairly consistent trends towards the utilization of expertise, the invocation of principles of organizational rationality, and the adoption of a discourse of participation -- all of them, though for different reasons, putative sources of added legitimation for the policy process (Weiler 1983a). Along this line of reasoning, specific policy strategies like experimentation with the Gesamtschule in the case of the FRG, and the conspicuous surge of expert commissions and large-scale analyses at the outset of Alain Savary's tenure as Minister of Education, could well be seen as deliberate efforts to enhance the standing of a policy process that had not been conspicuous for its legitimacy.

This line of interpretation could be carried a step or two further by adopting the premise that the modern state, for reasons having to do with its structural commitment to the existing order in the distribution of power and statuses, is basically unable to implement major reforms in areas as sensitive and potentially conflictual as education -- at least to the extent that those reforms would challenge the existing order of power and status. If we were to retain this premise, it would make sense to look, for example, at experimental

innovations not just as instruments of conflict management, but as another means of creating the appearance of reform-in-progress without having to make the (costly) political commitment of carrying the reform through beyond the limited range of the experimental "enclaves". In other words: Where, unlike in some of the French examples, planning and designing reforms may by itself not suffice to maintain the credibility of the state as forward-looking, adaptive, and reform-minded, instituting a major program of experimental, but real instances of reform would stand a much better chance of establishing that image.

Nor do France and West Germany have a monopoly on the politics of non-reform in education. "Education reforms are withering on the vine ... Reform rhetoric became more abundant, financial help more scarce ... We must restructure education in profound, rather than superficial ways ..." -- those are not comments on the Haby reforms or the Gesamtschule project, but observations of the President of the NEA on what has happened to the education reform movement of the 1980s (Futrell 1988).

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